No. 7.

The respective Duty of Minister & People.

M

1st Corinthians 4th. 2d Verse.

It is required in Stewards that a Man be found faithful.

Service implies fidelity; and the Circumspection and Diligence required are in proportion to the Importance of the delegated Commission. Of a Steward to whose care and management is entrusted the Property of his Master, or who is deputed to attend to a particular business, extreme fidelity and minute attention are indispensible qualities:—for, if his property be not carefully secured, or his business be not well conducted—a considerable share of blame will consequently fall on him who was appointed to improve the one, or to superintend the other.

Between the character of a Steward, as also some others mentioned in scripture, and the Ministers of the Gospel, there is a striking Analogy. They are the Overseers of the Church—they are Shepherds of the Flock of Christ—and it is their duty not only to preserve them "from the thief who cometh" with the diabolical design

" to steal, to kill, and to destroy"—not merely to pre-
ſerve them from harm—but alſo " to feed them in a
" good paſture, & to bring them into a good fold—to ſeek
" that which was loſt—to bring again that which was
" driven away, to bind up that which was broken, and
" to ſtrengthen that which was ſick."—

It may be of ſome uſe to ſtate the nature and of-
fice of a Chriſtian Miniſter—for we may then eaſily
perceive whether the effects are produced which may be ex-
pected from a divine Appointment—and if they are not,
we ſhall naturally be led—the Paſtor and the Flock—
each to " judge ourſelves that we be not judged of the
" Lord."

The Commiſſion our Lord gave to his Diſci-
ples, when He ſent them abroad to propagate Chriſtianity,
was expreſſed in theſe terms—" Go ye into all the world,
" & preach the Goſpel to every creature." And of us, the
ſucceſſors of the firſt Preachers, the ſame duty, under cer-
tain reſtrictions, is required—we are " to diſpenſe the
" word of life; and, as Ambaſſadors of the Author of
" Chriſtianity, to beſeech men, in his place and ſtead, to

" be reconciled to God" — we are to deliver, to the people committed to our charge, the principles of the Faith " as " they were once delivered to the Saints" — and as they now stand recorded in holy Scripture. — As the Servants of Christ, we are " to rebuke Vice — and if we know a " man to be overtaken in a fault, we are to endeavour to " restore him in the spirit of Meekness" — either by our private or public Ministration — " that we may not suf- " fer sin upon our brother. Our heart's desire and prayer " to God," for our people in particular, and the whole world in general, " is to be that they may be saved. — We " are not to have mens persons in admiration — but we " are to teach and preach — and, that without ceasing, the " Gospel of Jesus Christ" — applying it to the several cases & circumstances of our hearers as they severally require. — As Stewards of the mysteries of God, we are to be so faith- ful as to instruct the people, of whose Salvation we have sworn to be careful, in all things that may conduce to the welfare of their souls; that, being acquainted with every part of their Christian duty, they may at length " be per- " fect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works." —

We are to utter no preconceived—no favourite Doctrine of our own—" but that which the Lord hath written, that, " and that only are we to speak."—

Entrusted with the care of the Church " of God, " over which the Holy-Ghost hath made us Overseers, we " are to give the most earnest heed that we be found faith- " ful in all his house—and approve ourselves unto our " Master which is in Heaven," by making it the great and principal end—the continual aim and purpose of our lives—to promote God's glory and men's salvation.

Besides the many strict obligations by which we are engaged to live and act as becomes the Disciples of Jesus Christ, by a punctual observance of all those evange- lical Rules which are bound upon us, in common with other Christians; there are likewise several very momen- tous Duties we are obliged to practise in the daily exercise of our sacred Function, if we ever hope or expect to " make " full proof of our ministry"—which can be done no otherwise than by a full & conscientious discharge of every part of our ministerial duty. Our Employment is compared to that of Husbandmen, and of Laborers in

the time of Harvest—when "the Hills and Vallies, "standing thick with corn," invite the Reapers to "put "in their sickles because the Harvest is ripe." Hence we are to understand our indispensible duty is—to prepare the Soil—to sow the Seed—to destroy the Tares—"to be instant in season and out of season"—to labor with indefatigable Diligence—to render our Flock "a people prepared for the Lord."

Sometimes, in the Language of Holy Scripture, we are emphatically stiled Watchmen, which plainly intimates that we are bound to be continually on our guard—& to warn our people upon the approach of danger, that they may be prepared to receive their spiritual enemies, & having "put on the whole armor of God, they may be "able to stand in the evil-day, & to quench all the fiery "darts of the wicked."—

Nay, the Holy-Ghost hath thought fit to admonish us of the unwearied Labor and Watchfulness of our Calling, by giving us the Title of Shepherds; a Title derived from our great Lord and Master, who is, in the most eminent degree, "the great Shepherd and Bishop

" of our Souls." Now, by this Appellation, we cannot but be convinced that we are to take special heed to the Flock committed to our charge, by carefully seeking for all such as are lost—those " who are committing Iniquity " with greediness;" & bringing back to the Fold those that are gone astray—those who have departed from the simplicity of the Faith of the Gospel—" if haply by seeking the " Lord they may feel after Him and find Him."

We lament, with heart-felt concern, that, in the discharge of our duty, so many stumbling blocks should be thrown in the way, to hinder the effect of our Doctrine by the Scoffs of the Scorner—the Impiety of the Profane—the Indifference of the Lukewarm—and the Clamors of the Enthusiast. Some people are as sollicitous to advance the Empire of Satan, as tho' " he could give them all the " kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof " for their pains—and lest God should derive too much honor from the worship of his creatures, they seem eager to make the well-disposed and the wavering, " as much the Children of " Hell as themselves".—And they have too much reason, God knows, to exult in their success. If then, in at-

tempting to counteract this malice of Infidelity—to stem this torrent of Licentiousness—we seem to "stretch out ourselves beyond our measure"—if we "reprove, rebuke, exhort" with all the earnestness the importance of the case demands—if we set before your eyes the danger to which you are exposed—and conjure you, as ye dread the eternal displeasure of God, to deprecate it—tho' we should utter Truths harsh to your Ears, and offensive to your Principles—"forgive us this wrong:"—We have solemnly sworn that "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear"—we—for our part, will not fail to "declare "unto them the whole counsel of God. To bring many Sons "unto glory" is the object of our appointment—and if, by not attending to the work of the ministry, we give the enemy an opportunity "to sow his Tares whilst we sleep—"instead of doing the work of an Evangelist"—we afford men but too just occasion "to despise the offerings of "the Lord, and cause the name of God to be blas-"phemed."

May God grant that our ministry rather may prove effectual to the saving of men's souls—and that

every one may approve himself to be a faithful dispenser of God's holy word!

We have seen what is required of every Minister of the Gospel—let us, in the next place, observe what is required of the people to give power to his word, and efficacy to his ministry.

What is delivered is to be received as the word of God.—The minister is not to be considered as having any view in what he preaches, but a strong concern for the present and future welfare of his hearers.—"He speaks as to wise men—ye are to judge for your-"selves of the truth of what he says." The hearers of the word, therefore, are to "receive with meekness" the doctrines propounded—and to judge of them with impartiality, "whether they be of God or not:" they are to attend to the exhortations made to them—whether of Reproof, "to depart from Iniquity"—or of persuasion—"to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things"—&, if what he delivers be just & reasonable, and agreeable to the revealed will of God—it is indispensibly required of them to observe it. Their Salvation is the end

and aim of preaching the Gospel—it is not designed as a Trial of Skill, or an Exercise of Ingenuity—but "to "convert Sinners from the Error of their ways."

After having heard the word—we are expected to meditate upon it. Being the word of God it is intitled to this mark of our respect—being intended for our Salvation, we ought to reflect upon what we hear with seriousness, and apply it with fidelity, to our own case and circumstances. Let us then respectively ask ourselves whether the preaching of the word has produced in us those "fruits of good-living," which might, with justice, be expected from a divine ordinance—whether we have made that progress "in righteousness and true holi-"ness" which will insure our Salvation—and whether we clearly understand the nature—and uniformly fulfil the obligations, of the Covenant into which we have entered with God.

In preaching the word offences alas! must necessarily come.—Many have "itching ears, they will not "endure sound doctrine," but say unto their Ministers—"prophesy not unto us right things—but prophesy

" smooth things—prophesy deceit." One man, if we exhort him to adorn his profession by a peaceable carriage & a quiet demeanor—if we urge him to hallow the Sabbath, to attend the Church—to receive the Sacrament—complains, that we feed him only with husks, when he requires we should give him " the sincere milk of the word," and by and by he is offended—he either absents himself from the Church, or, if he continues to attend it, with a Heart full of bitterness & all uncharitableness, he represents its Ministers as " dumb dogs that cannot bark, and as blind " leaders of the blind"—and arrogates to himself, with the most shocking presumption, the property of Omniscience, impiously affirming that " both will one day fall " into the ditch—that, as it is with the people, so it is with " the priest"—and that, ere long, we shall be mutually accusing each other in the Regions of Woe, of Horror, & Despair.—Another, when we urge him to " set his af- " fections on things above, and to be transformed by the re- " newing of his mind," is offended with the severity of the Doctrine: he attends public worship—he discharges the debts he contracts—he wrongs no man—and so far all is

well—but when we say "one thing thou lackest—if thou "wouldst enter into life, thou must love the Lord thy "God with all thy heart, & soul, & mind, & strength"—thy very heart must be changed, and, to promote God's glory must be the end of all thy actions—"thou must call upon "Him by devout and diligent prayer" both in thy closet and in thy family, tho' the Doctrine be confessedly the Doctrine of the Gospel—because it is repugnant to his nature—he rejects, with Contempt and Abhorrence, the Preacher and the Doctrine together.

As to those who seldom attend the Church, and those who absent themselves entirely from it—if, after they have been admonished of their sinfulness—and, surely it is the duty of a Minister to admonish them—they continue—"like the deaf adder which stoppeth her ears"—to disregard his admonitions—such men can hardly be reckoned amongst those for whom, a Minister, at the great day of Retribution, shall give account—Happy, inexpressibly happy, will be the lot of those envied few, who can address the Redeemer of the world, in nearly his own words—"Lord! of those committed to my care, not one is lost!"

On the contrary—how deplorable will be his sitaation—how inconceivably wretched will he be—if the Almighty should apply to him the Language of the Prophet—"son "of man, I set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel "—When I said unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou "shalt surely die; thou didst not speak to warn the wick="ed from his way, and the wicked man has died in his "Iniquity, but his Blood will I require at thine hand." It behoves us both, my Brethren, to consider very seriously whether the Gospel be preached, on our part, with fidelity, and received, on yours, with effect.—For Imagination cannot conceive how solemn and awful will be our meeting at the grand Tribunal. God grant it may be with Confidence & Joy! The Ministers of the Gospel are to give a strict account of every discourse they have delivered—of its Tendency to forward the immortal Happiness of their Hearers—it will then be published before men & angels, whether, with vigilance of attention and solicitude of mind, we have labored and prayed to promote the Salvation of our respective Flocks: and, if we have been negligent in a matter of such vast concern—if we have been

regardless of the very thing which demands our utmost care—however we may have been employed in works of fancy, genius, or learning—however we may have been engaged in the traffic of gain, or have slept on the bed of sloth—as we can make no atonement for the souls we have suffered to perish, so we can plead nothing in justification of such strange, such unaccountable, such unpardonable neglect. And, on the other hand, when the people committed to our care—shall be called to account for the improvement of their several Talents—when neither the distinctions of the Great—the knowledge of the Learned—the obscurity of the Humble—nor the ignorance of the Poor—shall be admitted in excuse for their several vices—then, my Brethren, on whom can the blame be justly cast?—on your Minister, or yourselves? "If you "hear the sound of the Trumpet—& take not warning, "and the Sword come & take you away—your blood shall "be on your own head. You heard the sound of the Trum"pet, and took not warning, your blood shall be upon "you." But should the watchman not blow the Trumpet, and not "warn the people, if the sword come and take

" any person from among them, that person is taken away " in his Iniquity, but his Blood will God require at the " Watchman's hand." —Ask yourselves, before this interesting Scrutiny be made—whether you have not done despite to the Spirit of Grace—whether you have not mocked God by " beseeching Him to incline your Hearts " to keep his Laws," when you have continued perversely and wilfully to break them? How will the Drunkard wish he had attended to exhortations to sobriety?—How will the Swearer lament his Curses and Imprecations? How will the Prophane abhor himself for his Profaneness, when the word of God is delivering its Testimony against all the ungodly? If an human Judicature impresses us with solemnity—what will be our misgivings of mind, and anxiety of heart, when we stand before the Throne of God, every one to answer for his Improvement under the dispensation of the Gospel? God-Almighty give us all Grace to prepare for its Approach, that we may be received, through the merits of Jesus Christ, into his eternal Kingdom.

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Entered at Stationers Hall.